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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/29/2019

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SUBJECT: HAITI'S ELECTORAL COUNCIL DETAILS INQUIRIES INTO FIRST-ROUND FRAUD

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 419

Classified By: Amb. Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Leaders of Haiti's Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) told the Ambassador and other international community representatives May 28 that results of an inquiry into election-day fraud and irregularities in the Center Department April 19 would soon be published. A similar inquiry in the Artibonite is underway and one in the North will begin soon. The CEP, with considerable international assistance, is also working to publicize changes to polling station locations, encourage citizens to vote, and distribute identity cards in an effort to increase turnout for the second round of elections June 21 to fill 12 vacant seats in the Haitian Senate. End summary.

¶2. (C) At a meeting hosted by the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) May 28, Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) President Frantz-Gerard Verret described for senior MINUSTAH officials and donor country representatives the state of the CEP's inquiry into incidents of election-day violence and fraud April 19 (reftel). The CEP sent a committee of three experienced lawyers to establish the facts surrounding the incidents that led to the suspension of first-round voting in the Center Department and the exclusion of votes in some localities of the North and Artibonite Departments. The committee had just delivered its report on the Center the previous day, Verret said, and the CEP would soon transmit it to the Haitian government and make it public. The first round of voting would be re-run in the Center after those responsible for the violence here were identified and held responsible. The committee is currently conducting a similar inquiry in the Artibonite and will then proceed to the North Department.

¶3. (C) UN SRSG Hedi Annabi praised the CEP for its work organizing the first round of elections but noted the need to "accelerate" preparations for the second. In response, Verret described the CEP's continued efforts to educate voters. Many voters had not anticipated that the location of their polling station may have moved since the 2006 elections, changes necessitated by a new requirement in the 2008 Electoral Law that every commune have at least two voting centers. CEP Director-General Pierre-Louis Opont added that although the CEP made information available outside electoral offices, as well as by telephone, cell-phone text messaging, and the internet, many voters did not take the initiative to seek out the necessary

information. He said that many voters assume their voting registration would automatically transfer when they moved out of their old districts; but in fact, the voters are obliged to notify the authorities. In addition, CEP President Verret said, public transportation will not be prohibited during the June 21 voting, although restrictions will be enforced in areas immediately adjacent to voting centers.

¶4. (C) Verret described the first round of elections April 19 to fill 12 vacant seats in Haiti's 30-member Senate as a success despite modest voter turnout. Verret and Opont did, however, express frustration that a small number of poll workers were complicit in the irregularities or failed to report them. In response to a question from the Ambassador, Opont promised that employees responsible for negligence or malfeasance would be replaced for the second round, except in rare cases where the positions were subject to recruitment procedures including a competitive exam. In those cases, the CEP will organize the selection of replacements after the second round, he said.

¶5. (C) Verret also requested that donors authorize approximately USD 1 million in expenditures from a UNDP fund to buy devices that would scan voters' identity cards and automatically inform each voter where his or her polling station is located. A UNDP representative pointed out that UNDP procurement regulations would almost certainly preclude such an expenditure on an emergency basis, and donor country representatives weighed in with doubts about the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of the devices. That the CEP had requested the procurement on an emergency basis, European

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Commission Head of Delegation Francesco Gosetti lectured the CEP officials, indicated a lack of planning on their part.

¶6. (C) Comment: The CEP's commitment to identify those responsible for and complicit in first-round irregularities is encouraging, although actually bringing malefactors to justice will require action by the Haitian National Police and the Ministry of Justice. We are also encouraged by the CEP's commitment to redouble their voter education efforts. If voting centers are identified and information about polling stations is disseminated well in advance, turnout for the second round may increase significantly.

SANDERSON